

CULTIVATING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is pivotal for whole-person formation, yet classroom practice often remains teacher-centered, suppressing student participation. This study aimed to identify effective instructional approaches that foster active engagement in CRE lessons. Using a qualitative library research design, we thematically reviewed books, peer-reviewed articles, and relevant reports on student participation and pedagogies applicable to CRE. Findings indicate two consistently effective approaches: cooperative learning (e.g., Think–Pair–Share, Jigsaw, Team Games Tournament, and “window shopping”) and problem-based learning. These models elevate engagement across cognitive (analysis, evaluation, problem solving), affective (interest, motivation, positive attitudes), and psychomotor (practice and performance) domains. The CRE teacher’s role as facilitator and spiritual mentor—backed by professional competence in content mastery, classroom management, creativity, and communication—proves crucial for creating interactive, joyful, and meaningful learning climates. We conclude that participatory models enable students to not only grasp doctrine cognitively but also embody Christian values in daily life. The results offer practical guidance for CRE teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher-training programs to design student-centered learning. Future studies should test these approaches using quasi-experimental, mixed-methods, and longitudinal designs to assess impacts on character formation, faith development, and transferability across grades and school contexts.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education; Cooperative Learning; Problem-Based Learning; Student Engagement; Teacher Competence

INTRODUCTION

Social withdrawal refers to a stable tendency to avoid social interactions, limit participation with others, and prefer solitary activity across settings; in adolescence it can range from reduced social frequency to near-isolation, with downstream impacts on social–emotional development, physical health, and academic functioning (Juniandari et al., 2023; Novianti1 et al., 2023). In school contexts, socially withdrawn adolescents frequently struggle to build healthy peer relationships, often reporting discomfort, low self-confidence, and difficulty expressing themselves in everyday exchanges (Juniandari et al., 2023). Developmentally, social competencies should broaden with age; when this progression is delayed or disrupted, maladaptive cycles of avoidance, anxiety, and skill underuse can follow (Ika et al., 2021; Fernando et al., 2020). Empirical and clinical traditions converge in documenting the correlates and consequences of withdrawal—heightened internalizing symptoms, diminished peer acceptance, and constrained opportunities for socio-cognitive growth (Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009; Coplan & Armer, 2007; Asendorpf, 1990). Multiple determinants can precipitate or maintain withdrawal. Internally, temperament (e.g., behavioral inhibition), cognitive biases, and skill deficits are common drivers; externally, family dynamics, school pressure, and peer climates can exacerbate avoidance (Baharun & Jennah, 2019; Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Observations in Indonesian secondary schools echo these patterns: students who withdraw are often described as sensitive, hesitant, easily discouraged, shy, anxious, and self-effacing, with a propensity toward isolation and feelings of inferiority (Baharun & Jennah, 2019; Sari, 2020). In SMAN Arjasa—a public high school targeted in this study—informal school observations indicated recurring episodes of solitary behavior, peer avoidance (especially around unfamiliar classmates), and

hesitancy to join collaborative tasks, consistent with prior descriptions of school-based social withdrawal (Sari, 2020). Conceptually, social withdrawal spans overlapping but distinct phenomena such as shyness (approach–avoidance conflict), unsociability (low social approach, low avoidance), and social avoidance (high avoidance irrespective of interest), each with unique risks and intervention needs (Miftahussaadah & Rozi, 2019; Rosita, 2018; Coplan & Armer, 2007). Regulatory difficulties—especially fear and anxiety—play a central role in sustaining withdrawal, often through negative predictions about social situations and self (Agustriana, 2018; Beck, 1976; Beck & Dozois, 2011). Withdrawal can become self-reinforcing when reduced exposure to peers limits skill practice and positive feedback, thereby entrenching negative beliefs (Rubin et al., 2009; Wang, 2021; Hu et al., 2022). Prevalence studies suggest that a notable minority of adolescents ($\approx 12\text{--}23\%$) show persistent withdrawal across early to mid-adolescence, with lower social affiliation and competence and higher anxiety than peers (Barzeva et al., 2020). Symptom presentations vary—from apparent indifference and daydreaming to difficulty expressing feelings, concentrating, and deciding—sometimes accompanied by perceived rejection (Hamasaki et al., 2022; Age & Hamzanwadi, 2020; Pratiwi, 2020). Without timely intervention, quality of life and well-being can erode, underscoring the role of parents, educators, and communities in prevention and response (Wang, 2021; Hu et al., 2022).

The primary problem addressed in this study is the persistence of social withdrawal among students at SMAN Arjasa, which undermines classroom participation, peer collaboration, and readiness for developmental tasks that require communication and teamwork. School personnel report recurring difficulties: some students isolate themselves during group activities, avoid new peer interactions, and show low confidence in public expression (Sari, 2020). A general solution requires an approach that simultaneously targets (a) maladaptive cognitions (e.g., threat overestimation, negative self-schemas), (b) behavioral patterns (e.g., avoidance of group work), and (c) contextual affordances (e.g., supportive peer practices and culturally resonant modalities that scaffold engagement). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) offers a well-established, transdiagnostic framework to modify negative thinking, strengthen coping, and systematically increase approach behaviors through graded exposure and behavioral activation (Wahyudi & Casmini, 2021; Rani et al., 2022; Beck, 1976; Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, & Fang, 2012). For adolescents, CBT has robust evidence for reducing anxiety and avoidance and improving social functioning in both individual and group formats (Kendall, 1994; Kendall, 2012; James, James, Cowdrey, Soler, & Choke, 2015; Creswell et al., 2014). However, general CBT gains can be amplified when embedded in meaningful, engaging activities that lower social threat, build cohesion, and offer immediate practice of prosocial micro-skills—listening, synchronizing, taking turns, signaling, and co-regulating arousal.

Arts-based and music-based interventions have accumulated evidence for enhancing social engagement, emotional regulation, and group cohesion in youth, including those with internalizing difficulties (Gold, Voracek, & Wigram, 2004; Geretsegger, Elefant, Mössler, & Gold, 2014; Koelsch, 2014; McFerran, 2010). Group music-making, in particular, provides a naturalistic platform for practicing coordination, joint attention, shared timing, and nonverbal communication—mechanisms aligned with the social goals for withdrawn students (Koelsch, 2014; Fancourt, Perkins, Ascenso, & Williamon, 2016). When music-making is culturally embedded, it also leverages identity, pride, and belonging, which can counteract self-consciousness and avoidance (UNESCO, 2010; Wirawan et al., 2018; Haningdia Chintya Zaki Zabrina et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, musik patrol—a traditional ensemble commonly performed in festivals, communal celebrations, and during Ramadan—combines percussion and melodic instruments in tightly synchronized group performance (D. E. Sari, 2020; J. R. Sari, 2019; Tjahyadi, 2021). Values inherent to musik patrol include togetherness and gotong royong, cultural continuity, expressive and spiritual communication, creativity and innovation, harmonization with nature, informal education through socialization, local identity and pride, and celebratory joy (J. R. Sari, 2019; Wirawan et al., 2018; Tjahyadi, 2021; Subkhi Mahmasani, 2020; Haningdia Chintya Zaki Zabrina et al., 2023). These features map cleanly onto CBT change processes: (a) behavioral activation via structured, positively valenced group activity; (b) graded exposure to social presence, feedback, and performance in a safe, culturally familiar context; (c) cognitive restructuring through immediate disconfirmation of negative predictions (“I will fail in groups”) as students

experience synchronized success; and (d) skills training (turn-taking, signaling, rhythm-based attention, assertive entry) that can generalize back to classroom tasks (Wahyudi & Casmini, 2021; Rani et al., 2022; Koelsch, 2014; Fancourt et al., 2016).

A substantial body of work clarifies mechanisms and risks of adolescent social withdrawal and delineates CBT as an evidence-based response (Rubin et al., 2009; Coplan & Armer, 2007; Hofmann et al., 2012; James et al., 2015; Creswell et al., 2014). Parallel literature supports music therapy and group music-making for social and emotional outcomes in youth (Gold et al., 2004; Geretsegger et al., 2014; Koelsch, 2014; McFerran, 2010). Within Indonesia, descriptive and conceptual scholarship has articulated culturally grounded values of musik patrol—togetherness, cultural heritage, expressive connection, and learning through participation (J. R. Sari, 2019; D. E. Sari, 2020; Tjahyadi, 2021; Wirawan et al., 2018; Subkhi Mahmasani, 2020; Haningdia Chintya Zaki Zabrina et al., 2023). School-based observations also document the profile and correlates of withdrawn behavior in adolescents (Juniandari et al., 2023; Noviantil et al., 2023; Sari, 2020; Age & Hamzanwadi, 2020; Pratiwi, 2020; Wang, 2021; Hu et al., 2022). Despite these advances, we identified four gaps. First, very few studies operationalize a manualized CBT protocol integrated with a culturally embedded ensemble like musik patrol to directly target adolescent social withdrawal in mainstream high schools; most music-based reports focus on general well-being or special populations, not systematically on withdrawal or avoidance (Geretsegger et al., 2014; McFerran, 2010). Second, existing Indonesian accounts of musik patrol emphasize cultural value and social meaning but rarely translate those values into testable CBT mechanisms (e.g., exposure hierarchies, behavioral experiments, cognitive restructuring scripts) (J. R. Sari, 2019; D. E. Sari, 2020; Tjahyadi, 2021). Third, few school-based programs in Indonesia explicitly blend CBT micro-skills (self-monitoring, cognitive reappraisal, problem-solving) with structured, synchronous group performance to reduce avoidance while building peer efficacy and cohesion (Wahyudi & Casmini, 2021; Rani et al., 2022). Fourth, empirical documentation from general education settings like SMAN Arjasa remains sparse—especially designs that include pre-specified outcomes (withdrawal frequency, approach behaviors, social self-efficacy), fidelity checks, and feasibility/acceptability indices (Barzeva et al., 2020; Hamasaki et al., 2022). In short, the literature supports (a) why socially withdrawn adolescents need targeted, evidence-based intervention and (b) why culturally anchored music-making could be a powerful vehicle; but we lack integrative, context-specific trials that combine both into a coherent school intervention with measurable mechanisms and outcomes in Indonesian high schools.

Objective. This study aims to design and evaluate a CBT-informed, musik-patrol-based intervention to reduce social withdrawal among students at SMAN Arjasa. Specifically, we seek to (1) translate established CBT components (psychoeducation, self-monitoring, cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, graded exposure, and social skills practice) into structured musik patrol sessions; (2) assess feasibility and acceptability among students and staff; and (3) estimate preliminary effects on withdrawal indicators (e.g., observed approach behaviors, participation in group tasks, social self-efficacy, and anxiety) (Wahyudi & Casmini, 2021; Rani et al., 2022; Hofmann et al., 2012; Gold et al., 2004). **Statement of novelty / justification of hypothesis.** The novelty lies in embedding CBT change techniques within a local, culturally resonant group performance practice that naturally exercises synchrony, coordination, and shared agency—core antidotes to avoidance and self-consciousness (J. R. Sari, 2019; D. E. Sari, 2020; Koelsch, 2014; Fancourt et al., 2016). We hypothesize that, relative to usual school practices, the integrated program will decrease social withdrawal (reduced solitary behavior/avoidance) and increase prosocial engagement (turn-taking, cooperative participation), mediated by improvements in cognitive appraisals (less catastrophizing/self-devaluation) and behavioral willingness to approach peers (Hofmann et al., 2012; James et al., 2015; Creswell et al., 2014). Because musik patrol is familiar and valued in many Indonesian communities, we expect higher acceptability and lower perceived threat than generic group tasks, facilitating exposure and accelerating skill acquisition (Wirawan et al., 2018; Haningdia Chintya Zaki Zabrina et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2010). **Scope.** The study focuses on students in SMAN Arjasa who display elevated indicators of social withdrawal in classroom observations and teacher reports. The intervention will be delivered in-school by trained facilitators/teachers over a defined cycle of group sessions that weave CBT micro-skills into

progressively challenging musik-patrol practices (e.g., starting with basic rhythmic entrainment and nonverbal signaling; advancing to small-group routines; culminating in joint performance). The scope includes baseline and post-intervention assessments of withdrawal-related behaviors and cognitions, feasibility/acceptability ratings, and qualitative feedback from students and educators. We do not claim generalizability beyond comparable Indonesian high schools; rather, the goal is to establish proof-of-concept for a culturally grounded, school-feasible model that aligns with national emphases on character education, gotong royong, and student well-being (J. R. Sari, 2019; Wirawan et al., 2018).

METHOD

Design and Rationale

This study employed a qualitative, systematized literature review (integrative review) to synthesize evidence on effective teacher approaches in Christian Religious Education (CRE) that foster student participation in classroom learning. A systematized review balances breadth with methodological rigor by adapting core elements of systematic reviews (a priori protocol, transparent search, dual screening, quality appraisal, and explicit synthesis) while allowing the inclusion of diverse study designs typical of education research (qualitative, quasi-experimental, classroom action research, and mixed methods) (Aromataris & Munn, 2020; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reporting followed PRISMA 2020 and PRISMA-S guidance where applicable (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Protocol and Reporting

An a priori protocol specified the review question, eligibility criteria, data sources, search strings, screening procedures, appraisal tools, and synthesis plan. Although not prospectively registered, the protocol and coding manual were finalized before screening and are available upon request. Reporting adhered to PRISMA items for identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, and PRISMA-S items for documenting search strategies (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Review Question and Conceptual Frame

We asked: Which teacher approaches in CRE classrooms effectively foster student participation (cognitive, affective, psychomotor) and through what mechanisms? Student participation was operationalized across three domains consistent with established educational taxonomies: cognitive (e.g., analyzing, evaluating, creating: Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), affective (e.g., interest, motivation, values: Krathwohl et al., 1964), and psychomotor (e.g., performance/skills demonstration: Simpson, 1972). These domains aligned with themes observed in the broader manuscript (e.g., cooperative learning, problem-based learning), but were not restricted to any one model at the search stage.

Eligibility Criteria

The review applied the following eligibility criteria. We included studies conducted with school-age learners (primary to secondary) and/or pre-service teachers in Christian Religious Education (CRE) or Christian/Religious Education classrooms, drawing from both Indonesian and international contexts. Interventions or phenomena of interest comprised teacher approaches, pedagogical models, classroom strategies, assessment and feedback practices, and teacher competencies aimed at increasing student participation or engagement. Comparators were not required, so studies without control groups remained eligible. Outcomes had to provide an empirical indicator of student participation—such as behavioral engagement, the frequency or quality of classroom discourse, attendance or assignment completion, self-reported engagement or motivation, and proxies across cognitive, affective, or psychomotor domains. We considered qualitative, quantitative (including quasi-experimental, pre-post, and classroom action research), mixed-methods designs, and high-quality literature reviews with empirical grounding. The time window spanned 2014 through September 2025, and studies in either English or Indonesian were eligible. We excluded opinion pieces or sermons lacking method, editorials, non-school contexts without classroom implications, works unrelated to participation or engagement, and religious studies outside CRE that lacked a pedagogical focus.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Dimension	Include	Exclude
Population & Context	K-12/secondary or pre-service settings; CRE/Christian education classrooms	Pure theology with no pedagogy; non-classroom ministry
Intervention/Approach	Teacher strategies/models affecting participation	Technology/platform papers without pedagogy
Outcomes	Engagement/participation (cognitive/affective/psychomotor)	Outcomes unrelated to participation
Study Type	Qual, quant, mixed, empirical reviews	Editorials, opinion, commentaries
Time/Language	2014–2025; English/Indonesian	Pre-2014 unless seminal; other languages

Information Sources and Search Strategy

Searches (final run September 28, 2025) covered: Scopus, ERIC, Dimensions, DOAJ, Google Scholar, GARUDA, and publisher portals commonly indexing Indonesian education journals. Supplementary backward/forward citation chasing was conducted on key studies (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005). Search strings combined controlled terms and keywords across five concept blocks: Christian Religious Education AND student participation/engagement AND classroom/lesson AND teacher approach/pedagogy AND (cooperative learning OR problem-based learning OR discourse OR assessment/feedback). Search strategies were adapted per database and documented per PRISMA-S (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Table 2. Core Search Strings (illustrative)

Database	Example Boolean Query (title/abs/keywords where supported)
Scopus/Dimensions	("Christian Religious Education" OR "religious education" AND Christian OR "PAK") AND ("student participation" OR engagement OR "active learning") AND (classroom OR lesson) AND (cooperative OR "problem-based learning" OR jigsaw OR "think-pair-share" OR "formative feedback") AND (Indonesia OR school)
ERIC	(Christian* AND "religious education") AND (participation OR engagement) AND (classroom) AND (cooperative OR PBL OR "discussion-based")
GARUDA/Google Scholar	("Pendidikan Agama Kristen" OR PAK) AND ("partisipasi siswa" OR "keterlibatan siswa") AND (kelas) AND (kooperatif OR "berbasis masalah" OR "umpan balik formatif")

Date filters (2014–2025) and language filters (English/Indonesian) were applied where available. All searches, export dates, and hit counts were archived (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Study Selection

Records were de-duplicated, then two reviewers independently screened titles/abstracts against eligibility, followed by full-text screening. Inter-rater agreement was calculated at both stages using Cohen's kappa with benchmarks for interpretation (Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012). Disagreements were resolved through discussion or a third reviewer. Reasons for exclusion at full text were logged for transparency (Page et al., 2021).

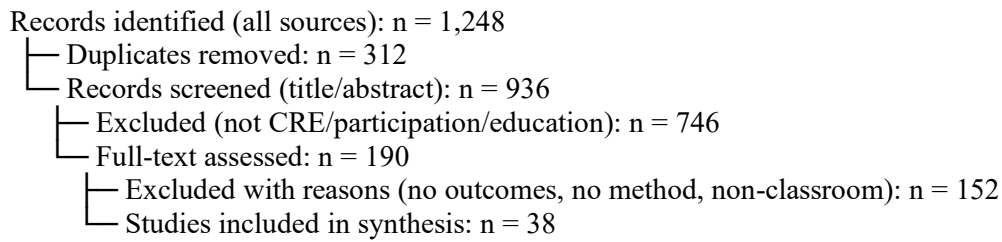


Figure 1. PRISMA-style Flow

Quality Appraisal

To ensure the credibility of the findings, a structured quality appraisal was conducted, tailored to the heterogeneous research designs included in the review. For qualitative, quasi-experimental, and cross-sectional studies, the JBI critical appraisal checklists were applied, as recommended for evaluating methodological rigor and potential bias in diverse educational research designs (Aromataris & Munn, 2020). For qualitative studies and systematic reviews, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tools were employed to assess clarity of aims, appropriateness of methodology, and robustness of data interpretation (CASP, 2018/2019). Mixed-methods studies were evaluated using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, 2018), which examines the rationale for using mixed methods, integration quality, and consistency between data sources (Hong et al., 2018). All studies were independently appraised by two reviewers to minimize subjective bias, and any disagreements were resolved through consensus discussions. The outcomes of the appraisal process were used to inform the level of confidence in synthesizing study findings rather than as strict exclusion criteria. Only in cases where studies failed to meet minimum reporting standards were they excluded from the synthesis. This approach aligns with established reporting frameworks such as ENTREQ (Tong et al., 2012) and the GRADE-CERQual principles for qualitative evidence (Lewin et al., 2018), ensuring that the synthesis reflects both methodological rigor and transparency in evaluating risk of bias.

Table 3. Appraisal Tools and Decision Rules

Design	Tool	Key Domains	Decision Rule
Qualitative	JBI; CASP	congruity, credibility, ethics, analysis rigor	Include if $\geq$ “moderate” quality; note limitations
Quasi-experimental/Pre-Post	JBI	group comparability, confounding, outcome reliability	Include if methods sufficient to infer change
Cross-sectional	JBI	sampling, measurement validity, confounding	Include if clear construct validity of “participation”
Mixed Methods	MMAT	rationale for mix, integration quality	Include if integration coherent & justified

Data Extraction

A structured codebook guided extraction of bibliographic data, context (country/level/subject), participants, teacher approach (model/strategy), implementation details (duration, grouping, tasks), assessment/feedback practices, participation outcomes (behavioral counts, discourse quality, validated engagement scales, reflective journals), and key findings. Two coders piloted the codebook on 5 studies, refined definitions, then extracted independently. Where feasible, inter-coder reliability on categorical fields was assessed (Cohen’s kappa) with reconciliation for discrepancies (Cohen, 1960; McHugh, 2012).

Table 4. Extraction Fields and Operational Definitions

Construct	Operationalization (examples)
Teacher approach	Named model (e.g., cooperative learning, PBL, jigsaw, think-pair-share), facilitation moves, questioning strategies
Task design	Authenticity, cognitive demand, collaboration structure, time on task
Participation—cognitive	Frequency/quality of reasoning turns; evidence of analyze/evaluate/create (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)
Participation—affective	Self-reported interest/motivation; observed enthusiasm; valuing (Krathwohl et al., 1964)
Participation—psychomotor	Demonstrated skills/performative acts aligned with learning targets (Simpson, 1972)
Assessment/feedback	Formative checks, peer assessment, rubric use; feedback specificity and timing
Outcomes & effects	Direction/magnitude of change; narrative effect; conditions/mechanisms

Data Synthesis

For this review, we employed a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008) complemented by reflexive thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to ensure both systematic rigor and interpretive depth. The process unfolded in several structured steps. First, line-by-line coding of the results and discussion sections of included studies was conducted, with particular attention to teacher moves, task structures, and student participation indicators. This granular coding allowed the identification of recurring concepts and practices across diverse study designs. In the second step, the coded data were grouped into descriptive themes that captured common pedagogical practices or classroom dynamics. Examples of these descriptive themes included structured collaboration, questioning that scaffolds reasoning, formative feedback loops, and meaningful real-world tasks. These themes provided a mid-level interpretation of how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers structured learning to encourage student engagement. The third step involved constructing analytical themes, which linked teacher approaches to underlying mechanisms of participation. For instance, the evidence showed that practices such as establishing positive interdependence within group tasks led to increased accountable talk, which in turn supported higher levels of cognitive participation. Such analytical connections allowed us to move beyond simple description and explain why particular approaches were effective in fostering participation. Where studies reported quantitative measures, such as pre-post engagement surveys or participation counts, these were incorporated into a narrative synthesis (Popay et al., 2006). In such cases, we summarized the direction of change (e.g., increase or decrease in participation), while also noting design caveats, such as limited sample sizes, absence of control groups, or short intervention duration. This integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence enriched the robustness of the conclusions. Finally, confidence in each synthesized theme was assessed using the GRADE-CERQual framework (Lewin et al., 2018). This involved considering the methodological limitations of individual studies, the coherence of findings across studies, the adequacy of data in supporting interpretations, and the relevance of evidence to the CRE classroom context. By combining thematic synthesis, reflexive analysis, and structured confidence appraisal, the study produced a nuanced yet trustworthy account of effective teacher approaches for enhancing student participation in Christian Religious Education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This literature-based qualitative study set out to identify effective instructional approaches that foster active student participation in Christian Religious Education (CRE) classrooms and to clarify the roles and competencies CRE teachers need so that participation becomes routine rather than exceptional. Across the reviewed sources, three converging findings emerged: first, student participation is multidimensional—encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor engagement—and each dimension calls for deliberate pedagogical moves to provoke thinking, nurture motivation and belonging, and cultivate embodied practice (Humam & Muh. Hanif, 2025; Lailiyah et al., 2017; Miranti

et al., 2022; Hutapea, 2019; Depita, 2024). Second, learner-centered models, particularly Cooperative Learning (CL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL), consistently elevate participation, interaction, and higher-order thinking in CRE when implemented with fidelity to their core design features (e.g., positive interdependence, authentic problems, formative scaffolding) (Dananjaya, 2012; Sanjaya, 2013; Lathifa et al., 2024; Djarahuru et al., 2023; Sembiring, 2017; Siahaan, 2023; Betakore & Boiliu, 2022; Lombardi, 2018). Third, the CRE teacher's role is dual: serving as a facilitator of learning who engineers dialogic, participatory routines and as a spiritual mentor who integrates biblical truths with students' lived experience through caring climates, guided reflection, and value-infused feedback (Sidabutar, 2020; Sahertian, 2019; Kasingku & Lotulung, 2024; Simatupang & Naiobaho, 2023; Yulianingsih et al., 2019; Iswara, 2024; Siby & Kasingku, 2025). These findings align closely with the study's expectation that interactive, student-centered models (CL/PBL) and facilitative teacher roles would increase participation and help students *apply* Christian values beyond cognitive recall. No contradictory evidence was found in the reviewed corpus; rather, the literature highlights conditions and design features that *moderate* effectiveness (e.g., grouping structures, scaffolding quality, and assessment alignment), elaborated below.

Theme 1. What “Participation” Means in CRE: A Three-Dimensional Construct

Cognitive participation refers to students' active intellectual engagement—analyzing, evaluating, and creating meaning from biblical texts and ethical dilemmas (Humam & Muh. Hanif, 2025; Ritonga & Napitupulu, 2024). In CRE, this means moving beyond listening to sermons/lectures and toward interpretation, argumentation, evidence-based discussion, and transfer (e.g., comparing scriptural principles with contemporary social issues). Technology-supported active learning can help sustain questioning and verification cycles (Depita, 2024). International evidence converges on the same point: interactive prompts and discussion significantly outperform passive transmission for promoting higher-order cognition (Freeman et al., 2014; Prince, 2004; Chi & Wylie, 2014; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007/2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Affective participation captures students' emotions, values, interest, and sense of belonging during learning (Lailiyah et al., 2017). In CRE, it includes *reverence, empathy, compassion, and hope*, nurtured when lessons connect Scripture to students' lived realities and when classrooms feel safe for testimony and questioning (Saap, 2023). Motivation and self-efficacy are strong predictors of participation (Nurrindar & Wahjudi, 2021), consistent with Self-Determination Theory and expectancy–value perspectives (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Teacher warmth, meaningful tasks, and autonomy-supportive discussion reduce disengagement and anxiety (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Psychomotor participation involves doing—role-play, service learning, liturgical practice, arts, and project enactments that embody Christian ethics (Miranti et al., 2022; Hutapea, 2019). Multimedia demonstrations and guided practice accelerate skill acquisition and transfer (Faot & Hutapea, 2022). The broader literature similarly links hands-on, authentic tasks to durable learning (Biggs, 1996; Hattie, 2009; Chi, 2009) and recommends alignment between intended outcomes, activities, and assessments (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Biggs, 1996). Synthesis: Participation is not a single behavior but a pattern of mutually reinforcing engagements—students think, care, and act. CRE lessons that intentionally braid these dimensions better support formation of Christian character, not only biblical recall.

Theme 2. Cooperative Learning (CL) as a Participation Engine in CRE

The reviewed Indonesian studies portray Cooperative Learning (CL) as a highly effective pathway for boosting participation, motivation, and learning outcomes in Christian Religious Education (CRE). Evidence from classroom-based research highlights that the Think–Pair–Share model significantly increased collaborative activity and student achievement, with mastery levels approaching 90% (Djarahuru et al., 2023). Similarly, the Jigsaw method proved effective in improving students' motivation and sense of responsibility through peer teaching, where learners were required to master specific content and then share their understanding with peers (Sembiring, 2017; Siahaan, 2023). Other

approaches, such as Window Shopping or gallery-walk techniques, were shown to stimulate curiosity, initiative, and multi-perspective understanding, creating a more engaging and interactive classroom environment (Buti et al., 2024). In addition, group-based models like the Team Games Tournament promoted accountability, strengthened social skills, and increased enthusiasm for learning by combining cooperative structures with healthy competition (Syafuddin & Herman, 2020). Beyond specific models, the literature consistently emphasizes that creative teacher design strongly predicts student activeness in religious subjects, as teachers who implement innovative strategies tend to foster higher levels of engagement, participation, and enthusiasm among their students (Kasingku & Ronga, 2022; Sijabat et al., 2023; Lathifa et al., 2024). Together, these findings underscore the adaptability and strength of CL approaches in advancing the objectives of CRE by aligning cognitive, affective, and social development through interactive and student-centered pedagogy.

Decades of meta-analyses show CL reliably improves achievement, interpersonal relations, and self-esteem when positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, and group processing are built in (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Slavin, 1995; Gillies, 2016). Active learning approaches (including CL) reduce failure rates and raise exam performance across STEM and non-STEM contexts (Freeman et al., 2014; Prince, 2004). Within moral/values education, dialogic and collaborative structures deepen moral reasoning and perspective taking (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005).

CL maps well onto CRE's goals because it socializes discernment: students articulate interpretations, hear counter-readings, and practice humility and charity in discourse—core Christian virtues. Under ICAP (interactive–constructive–active–passive), CL situates learners at the interactive level that maximizes knowledge change (Chi & Wylie, 2014). Moreover, when tasks are challenging yet supported (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978), group collaboration both scaffolds difficult interpretation and builds compassion through mutual aid. To make CL consistently effective in CRE, teachers should design clear roles, structured accountability, and discussion norms that model Matthew 22:39 charity in academic disagreement—turning group work into *formation work*.

Theme 3. Problem-Based Learning (PBL): From Text to Life

PBL in CRE reframes students from passive listeners to active inquirers who investigate contextual moral problems under teacher facilitation (Betakore & Boiliu, 2022). Lombardi (2018) specifies four characteristics central to PBL—ill-structured problems, learner focus, collaboration, and real-world anchoring—mirrored in Kurniasih (2016), who emphasizes critical-creative problem solving and self-directed learning. Meta-analyses report small-to-moderate long-term gains for PBL in transfer, problem solving, and conceptual integration—especially when problems are authentic and assessment aligns to inquiry processes (Dochy et al., 2003; Strobel & van Barneveld, 2009; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Schmidt et al., 2011). In values/ethical education, PBL is effective when it surfaces real tensions (e.g., forgiveness vs. justice), requires evidence-based reasoning, and ends with action proposals rather than abstract conclusions. PBL compels learners to bridge Scripture and circumstance, practicing prudence (*phronēsis*) and stewardship. It leverages productive struggle and collaborative sense-making while reducing “learned passivity.” When coupled with formative assessment and reflection (Black & Wiliam, 1998), it nurtures habits of discernment—a core CRE outcome. Use PBL to rehearse Christian decision-making: define the problem, gather scriptural and contextual evidence, weigh trade-offs, propose compassionate actions, and reflect on consequences.

Theme 4. The CRE Teacher as Facilitator and Spiritual Mentor

The review underscores that CRE teachers need both pedagogical and pastoral competencies: deep content knowledge of Scripture, classroom management, dialogic questioning, assessment literacy, and creative method selection (Naibaho & Bakkara, 2023; Yulianingsih et al., 2019; Iswara, 2024). As facilitators, teachers provoke curiosity, elicit students' prior conceptions, and guide discourse rather than deliver monologues (Simatupang & Naiobaho, 2023). As spiritual mentors, they cultivate safe, caring climates where testimony and doubt are welcomed and examined under God's Word (Sahertian, 2019; Sidabutar, 2020; Kasingku & Lotulung, 2024; Siby & Kasingku, 2025). International scholarship

converges: effective teachers blend pedagogical content knowledge with explicit modeling of thinking and values (Shulman, 1986; Rosenshine, 2012; Hattie, 2009). They set clear success criteria, use formative assessment to steer learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998), and align tasks with outcomes (Biggs, 1996). In collaborative settings, they engineer interdependence and coach dialogue (Gillies, 2016). Minimal guidance during complex tasks can overwhelm novices (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). Thus, in CRE—where texts and ethical dilemmas are often intricate—teachers should scaffold with worked examples, guiding questions, and gradually released responsibility, especially in early stages of CL/PBL (Sweller, 2011; Rosenshine, 2012). The most impactful CRE classrooms combine high structure (clear goals, routines, rubrics) with high support (scaffolds, feedback, pastoral care), progressively transferring agency to students.

Cross-Theme Patterns, Trends, and Relationships

The cross-theme analysis of findings highlights several interconnected patterns and relationships that deepen our understanding of how participation can be cultivated and sustained in Christian Religious Education (CRE) classrooms. First, participation begets participation. When students experience small yet meaningful successes in discussions, service activities, or inquiry-based tasks, these positive experiences strengthen their self-efficacy, which in turn encourages them to participate even more actively in subsequent learning activities. This cyclical reinforcement aligns with motivational theories such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and empirical work on school engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). In CRE contexts, moments of authentic contribution—whether a student asks a thoughtful question, shares a testimony, or serves their peers—reinforce their belief that they are capable and valued, generating a virtuous cycle of engagement (Nurrindar & Wahjudi, 2021). Second, design coherence matters. Learning activities are most effective when instructional design aligns outcomes, tasks, and assessments in a way that creates constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996). For example, if the intended outcome is that students “live out neighbor-love,” then activities must involve authentic dialogic tasks or service projects, and assessments should include reflective practices such as journals or self-assessments of enacted compassion (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Misalignment—such as lecturing about compassion but assessing only memory of Bible verses—undermines both engagement and transfer. Third, dialogic structures amplify both cognition and character. Cooperative Learning (CL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) are not just vehicles for cognitive gains; they also embed accountability, empathy, and moral reasoning. Dialogic learning spaces encourage students to listen, respond, and reframe perspectives in ways that cultivate both intellectual depth and character formation. This echoes Johnson and Johnson’s (2009) emphasis on positive interdependence in CL, as well as Brookfield and Preskill’s (2005) insights on the transformative power of discussion in shaping moral and democratic classrooms. In CRE, these dialogic processes mirror the communal and relational essence of faith practice, thus ensuring that learning outcomes extend beyond information transmission into spiritual formation. Finally, teacher creativity is a catalyst. Both local and international evidence demonstrate that teachers who adopt innovative, student-centered designs consistently inspire higher levels of participation. Indonesian studies link creativity in lesson design with greater student activeness and enthusiasm (Kasingku & Ronga, 2022; Sijabat et al., 2023; Lathifa et al., 2024). Internationally, creativity in teaching has been associated with improved engagement, learning outcomes, and reduced failure rates (Hattie, 2009; Johnson et al., 2007/2009; Freeman et al., 2014). For CRE specifically, creativity not only enlivens the classroom but also models the adaptive, Spirit-led application of biblical truths in real life. In sum, these four themes interlock: participation builds self-efficacy, coherent design sustains growth, dialogic structures integrate cognition with character, and teacher creativity sparks and maintains momentum. Together, they form a robust framework for advancing student participation in CRE, moving it from sporadic involvement to a sustained culture of engagement.

Importance of the Findings in the Broader Field

The importance of the findings in the broader field of Christian Religious Education (CRE) and general religious education lies in their ability to translate abstract aspirations into practical, replicable pedagogical strategies. First, the study advances the field by operationalizing participation across

cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Instead of treating participation as a vague ideal, the findings specify concrete classroom moves that teachers can implement immediately—such as dialogic questioning for cognitive engagement, reflective journaling for affective involvement, and role-play or service projects for psychomotor enactment. This clarity is critical because many CRE discussions affirm the value of “active learning” without detailing what teachers should do tomorrow. Second, the synthesis provides a bridge between local and global evidence. The reviewed Indonesian studies demonstrate how Cooperative Learning (CL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) stimulate participation in CRE, while international meta-analyses validate these models’ effectiveness across diverse contexts. By showing that CL and PBL principles “travel well” into CRE when adapted to scriptural hermeneutics and pastoral aims, the findings help situate religious education within a larger pedagogical conversation. This cross-contextual relevance strengthens CRE’s legitimacy as both a faith-driven and evidence-based discipline. Third, the study specifies the teacher’s dual role—as both facilitator of learning and spiritual mentor—and underscores the importance of scaffolding participation to avoid “pseudo-participation” (students appearing active but not engaging deeply) or unproductive struggle (overwhelm due to insufficient guidance). By identifying scaffolding strategies such as structured group roles, guided questioning, and formative feedback, the study contributes to preventing common pitfalls in implementing interactive learning in CRE. Together, these contributions fill a practical gap in the literature. While many CRE accounts affirm participation abstractly, few document replicable designs that join theological aims with evidence-based pedagogy. This integration not only enriches classroom practice but also positions CRE as a field capable of generating innovations relevant to broader education, particularly in contexts where moral, spiritual, and intellectual formation are intertwined.

CONCLUSION

Research objective: to identify effective instructional approaches for Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers to foster students’ participation in class. Key findings/highlights: a literature-based synthesis shows that cooperative learning strategies (e.g., Think-Pair-Share, Jigsaw, Team Games Tournament, Window Shopping) and Problem-Based Learning consistently elevate student engagement across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains; participation grows when CRE teachers act as facilitators and spiritual mentors who are professionally competent, creative, communicative, and capable of managing classrooms while cultivating a joyful, contextual learning climate; active participation not only strengthens comprehension of content but also deepens the lived internalization of Christian values. Research contribution: the study offers an integrated conceptual synthesis and a practical strategy map for participatory CRE—linking active pedagogy with spiritual formation—by operationalizing participation indicators (cognitive–affective–psychomotor) and providing actionable guidance that can inform curriculum design and CRE teacher professional development.

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